



*Samish Indian Nation*

OF WASHINGTON

August 1<sup>st</sup> 2023

Marla Koberstein  
Rulemaking Lead  
Washington State Department of Ecology  
PO Box 47600  
Olympia, WA 98504-7600

*Re: Designation of the Cascade River (Skagit County) as a Tier III(A) Outstanding Resource Waters under the Clean Water Act*

Dear Ms. Koberstein:

My name is Todd Woodard, Infrastructure and Resources Executive Director for the Samish Indian Nation. I write today in support of the proposed rulemaking to adopt the upper reaches of the Cascade River as a Tier III(A) Outstanding Resource Water pursuant to WAC 173-201A-330.

The Samish Indian Nation is the successor to the large and powerful Samish Tribe, a signatory to the Treaty of Point Elliott in 1855. The Tribe's traditional territory stretches over a wide region of the Salish Sea in Northwest Washington, from the tops of the Cascades Mountains to the far western shores of the San Juan Islands. The beauty, abundance and variety of the region since time immemorial provides a rich backdrop for our history and cultural traditions that remain strong today. The Samish Indian Nation is dedicated to supporting and protecting the rivers, streams, and wetlands that provide the abundant natural resources that are a large part of Samish cultural identity. Without healthy rivers, streams and wetlands, salmon and other species languish and so does the ability for Samish to pass on its traditions to the next seven generations and beyond. These waterways provide a multitude of ecosystem services including clean drinking water for communities, habitat that is critical to health and abundance of fish and wildlife species, and scenic beauty that is a defining attribute of our quality of life and inseparable from the heritage and heart of our people. **In keeping with our traditions, values, and rights, we strongly support the designation of the Cascade River as an Outstanding Resource Water and urge Ecology to adopt the proposed rule, bestowing the highest level of protection for these pristine yet vulnerable waters.**

Rivers do not exist or run alone. A living river is part of a greater whole, an ecosystem of wide-ranging species, flows, and cycles. The Cascade River is part of the greater Skagit River system but is unique among rivers in the basin for its exceptional water quality, which renders the river a critical resource for salmon recovery. The Skagit River system, including the pristine Cascade River, provides habitat for Chinook, chum, coho, sockeye, pink salmon, and trout species as well. The Cascade River alone has a wild and unique spring Chinook stock that regularly returns hundreds of salmon. Sustained by high-quality waters, these keystone salmon in turn provide sustenance for a terrestrial web of linked species, including old growth forest, the northern spotted owl, the marbled murrelet, and more.

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While the Cascade River's Wild and Scenic River designation affords limited protection to some stretches of the river, it does not preserve the river's essential quality in perpetuity. Designating the nominated reaches of the Cascade River as a Tier (III)A ORW will bolster existing protections and expand overall protection for this truly remarkable river. In an era of multiple and compounding crises, such as climate change, conserving and protecting existing resources is a necessity. The Cascade River and its clear, cold waters carry ancestral significance for our Tribe and yield life-giving properties to the network of communities and species that depend on it, including the Samish people and our cultural link to natural resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We appreciate the Department of Ecology for prioritizing an Outstanding Resource Waters rulemaking for the Cascade River and offer our support for protecting this high-quality resource of Tribal and greater significance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Todd Woodard".

Todd Woodard  
Infrastructure and Resources Executive Director  
Samish Indian Nation  
[twoodard@samishtribe.nsn.us](mailto:twoodard@samishtribe.nsn.us)